



Choose Your Cover

SKIN CANCER FACTS

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer has increased in the United States: more than one million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in 1998. The incidence of malignant melanoma, one of the deadliest forms of skin cancer, doubled among whites between 1973 and 1994. Furthermore, melanoma is more common than any non-skin cancer among people between 25 and 29 years old.

The three major types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas can cause substantial illness and, untreated, can cause considerable damage and disfigurement. If detected and treated early, however, these carcinomas have a cure rate of more than 95%. Malignant melanoma causes more than 75% of all deaths from skin cancer. This disease can spread to other organs, most commonly the lungs and liver. Malignant melanoma diagnosed at an early stage usually can be cured, but melanoma diagnosed at a late stage is more likely to spread and cause death.

Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important environmental factor in the development of skin cancer. This makes skin cancer a largely preventable disease when sun protective practices and behaviors are consistently applied and utilized. UV rays from artificial sources of light, such as tanning beds and sun lamps are just as dangerous as those from the sun, and should also be avoided. Unfortunately, despite the fact that both tanning and burning can increase one's risk of skin cancer, most Americans do not protect themselves from UV rays.

Who Is at Risk?

Although anyone can get skin cancer, individuals with certain risk factors are particularly at risk. Some risk factors for skin cancer are:

- Light skin color
- Family history of skin cancer
- Personal history of skin cancer
- Chronic exposure to the sun
- History of sunburns early in life
- Certain types and a large number of moles
- Freckles as an indicator of sun sensitivity and sun damage



Preventing Skin Cancer: Sun Protection Options

People can take many simple steps to plan ahead and protect themselves from the sun's UV rays. These options are important to remember all year round and during all outdoor activities, not just when at the beach or pool.

- **GET A HAT** – Up to 80% of skin cancers occur on the head and neck, so a wide-brimmed hat should be worn to shade the face, ears, scalp, and neck from the sun's UV rays. A hat with a four-inch brim provides the most protection. If a baseball cap is worn, sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 should also be used to protect the ears and neck.
- **COVER UP** – A shirt, beach cover-up, or pants are all good choices. However, a typical shirt actually has an SPF rating substantially lower than the recommended SPF 15, so it is wise to double up on protection by using sunscreen with at least SPF 15 and staying in the shade when possible.
- **SEEK SHADE** – Because the sun's UV rays are strongest and do the most damage during midday, outdoor activities should be avoided at this time. If this is not possible, then finding the shade of a tree, beach umbrella, or tent is a practical way to protect the skin.
- **RUB IT ON** – Sunscreen with at least SPF 15 should be used whenever a person spends time outdoors. To be effective, sunscreen needs to be generously applied 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapplied throughout the day, especially after swimming or exercising.
- **GRAB SHADES** – Sunglasses protect the tender skin around the eyes and reduce the risk of developing cataracts. Look for sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays. Wrap-around lenses are ideal because they keep UV rays from hitting the sides of the eyes.

For More Information

For more information about the skin cancer prevention campaign, visit CDC's "Choose Your Cover" Web site at www.cdc.gov/ChooseYourCover.

Information Compiled from the Following Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

American Academy of Dermatology

American Cancer Society

National Cancer Institute